

2. Where we are now - organisation

2.1 Kearsney Parks – then and now

Today Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens (originally known as Kearsney Court) are the most important publicly accessible parks with heritage interest in our district. Located 2.5 miles north-west of Dover town and close to Kearsney railway station, the parks complex is highly valued by the community as the most popular in the area.

Situated adjacent to the Kent Downs AONB, the ecology of the parks has been shaped by their linear development along the River Dour. This spring-fed, fast-flowing chalk stream runs for four miles from a source close to the parks, through the town and out to sea. The water quality is excellent due to natural filtering through the chalk beds of the Downs. It supports a rich mix of botanical and invertebrate life, including a significant colony of brown trout and European eel. Water is an important feature of the designed landscapes throughout the parks.

The River Dour also provided an important source of power for Dover's historic industries. The first recorded mill in Britain was a Corn Mill on the Dour in 762AD, with 13 water mills subsequently being located along the banks of the River Dour. Heritage features such as mill leats, weirs, sluices and culverts remain important parts of the parks landscape and this history contributes significantly to the character of the town. It was the wealth created by this industry that led prominent local businessmen to develop the country houses and estates that developed into the fine public parks that exist today.

Russell Gardens is a fine example of such an estate and is Grade II Listed in the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. It covers an area of 3.3 hectares.

Kearsney Court was planned in 1899 for Alfred Leney (1837-1900), owner of the Phoenix Brewery in Dover. The project was sold on to Edward Barlow, the owner of the paper manufacturer, Wiggins Teape, who maintained a paper mill in Dover up until 2000. Barlow commissioned Thomas Mawson (1861-1933), the leading landscape designer of the Edwardian era and an exponent of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Several set-piece photographs of Kearsney Court were included in Mawson's book, 'The Art & Craft of Garden Making' (1926), which became a standard reference in its day.

On Barlow's death in 1912 the property passed to Mr Johnstone, a London newspaper man, and was later used as a nursing home and as a military hospital in World War II. After the war, the gardens were acquired by the local council and it was opened as a public park in 1951, re-named Russell Gardens after Alderman Hilton Russell. Kearsney Court House was bought by a development company in the 1950s and split into seven residential freeholds.

The challenging, steep terrain of the Alkham Valley provided Mawson with the ideal opportunity to create his signature design features - grand terraces, pergolas and architectural features in a garden context. The magnificent 170m x 15m canal pond, and Grade II Listed Palladian-style pergola bridges and boathouse pavilion form the central architectural features of the parks. Despite changes in ownership the site retains its original form and character. Laid out in a formal style, it is a popular local park that provides an interesting contrast to the less formal style of Kearsney Abbey.

Across the Alkham Road, Kearsney Abbey is another exemplary illustration of a country house and estate setting. Directly opposite Russell Gardens and covering 17.3 hectares, its history can be traced back to the Norman Conquest. Known at that time as Castney Court, it was part of the Barony of Saye (c.1070) whose men maintained and garrisoned the Saye Tower in Dover Castle.

Like Russell Gardens, the clear waters of the River Dour are a prominent feature of the park, contributing to the picturesque landscape style. A lake runs west to south east across the whole site for 270 metres along the course of the River Dour. There are islands in the lake on either side of a Grade II Listed 19th Century ornamental bridge, and on the west side, an ornate fountain, first evident on OS maps from 1862. The River Dour continues past the paper mill ruins and on to Dover harbour.

Kearsney Abbey also maintains the heritage connection with mills and paper making on the River Dour. River Paper Mill, known as Radford's Mill, was located on the site until 1918. The remains of the mill can be seen in the area of Kearsney Abbey known today as "the ruins". Many of the culvert features within Kearsney Abbey were part of the mill's design.

The naturalistic parkland of Kearsney Abbey is characterised by a fine collection of specimen and designed tree planting, including Beech, Lime, and Yew, amongst others. A prominent feature is a Cedar of Lebanon which is believed to be one of the oldest of its kind in the country. The presence of trees and water make this an ideal habitat for bats, whilst the grassland supports reptiles and amphibians. Mute swans are a popular visitor to the parks.

Although never a monastic estate, the Abbey takes its name from the impressive Gothic revival manor house built between 1820-1822 by local merchant and banker, John Minet Fector. He was known to have acquired much of the stonework for the house from Dover's medieval old town walls and gatehouses, demolished in the early 19th century. Sections of wall, arches, gate piers and bridges within Kearsney Abbey are Grade II listed.

Most of Fector's house was demolished in 1959 due to extensive dry rot; only the billiards room remains today which, with its fine, original interior is popular as a café. This building is Grade II Listed.

A mound located 45 metres south of the lake and to the west of the bridge marks the spot of an open air theatre created to celebrate the 1951 Festival of Britain where a production of A Midsummer Night's Dream was staged. Some of the Lime trees that formed the avenue south of the lake up the steep slopes of Coxhill Mount are still in existence.

Today, Kearsney Abbey is the most popular parks in the Dover district. A 2011 survey undertaken by the HLF-funded Up on The Downs project in both the Dover and Shepway districts revealed that Kearsney Abbey was by far the most popular destination across both districts, with 59% of people surveyed having visited in the last year.

The open parkland and lakes of Kearsney Abbey are frequented year-round but are particularly popular with families during the spring and summer months as a favourite picnic spot. However, despite their historic and community value, a large amount of investment is required to restore both Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens to their former glory. Significant investment is also required to bring the visitor facilities up to standard and to maintain them.

2.2 Location

Kearsney Parks are located 3.5 kilometres north-west of Dover town centre and 1.5km from Whitfield. Alkham Road is the parish boundary, with Kearsney Abbey located in River and Russell Gardens located in Temple Ewell.

The map below indicates the location of Kearsney Abbey in relation to Dover. The post code of the Kearsney Abbey café is CT16 3DZ.



2.3 Our commitment to the Mills to Mawson project

Dover District Council is committed to the protection, restoration and improvement of all of our significant heritage sites, including Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens. We also recognise the contribution that well managed parks, heritage features and natural spaces have for the local community, tourism and health and wellbeing. We also know that the parks are highly valued community assets, where local people feel safe and welcome. By working with various partners we can deliver the Mills to Mawson project to a high standard and bring our vision to life. Discussions around how to best protect Kearsney Parks in the long run resulted in agreement to seek funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

To help us understand how to sensitively restore and improve the parks, we appointed Bramhill Design to work with us to produce a conservation plan for Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens (together known as Kearsney Parks from this point onwards). The project excludes the adjacent Bushy Ruff, mainly because the landscape is less historically significant.

The Kearsney Parks Conservation Plan identifies the significance of the heritage of both sites as well as establishing recommendations for the restoration and conservation of the parks in the future. The key recommendations are:

- Make the original designs more legible by removing secondary tree growth or overgrown original planting to reveal views and vistas where possible
- Re-design the path networks in both parks to reflect circulation needs and consideration of easy access routes
- Re-design car parking facilities addressing how this relates to redeveloping the café area of Kearsney Abbey and visitor use of both sites
- Redevelop the Kearsney Abbey café to expand capacity, create a flexible use area as well as covered congregation space whilst providing better integrated WC facilities and maintenance accommodation
- Provide better visitor facilities at Russell Gardens to include WCs, shelter and refreshments to expand visitor times in the gardens and to encourage their use and appreciation
- Develop an activities plan that promotes understanding of the heritage of the parks and encourages broader use of the physical resources
- Develop a management plan that safeguards the unique cultural and historical values of the parks for future generations to enjoy

Our activity plan builds on the issues and opportunities, aims and objectives established in our conservation plan as follows:

| Conservation Plan objectives | How the activity plan can deliver this objective |
|--|--|
| To balance the uses of Kearsney Parks as historic landscapes; as local public parks; as a regional attraction; as an events venue; as places with significant educational potential; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase understanding of heritage • Increase sense of ownership among local community • Promote the parks as a regional attraction, while managing the impact of visitors • Develop events programme • Develop formal educational programme |
| To display horticultural and parks management excellence; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit additional staff • Develop volunteering programme • Promote the Kearsney Parks Forum and Kearsney Parks Event Group • Deliver training for staff and volunteers |
| To communicate the history of the landscape, including its archaeology, ecology and uses, effectively | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery activities to uncover history of the landscape, including archaeology, art, ecology, people, buildings • Develop interpretation plan to ensure we communicate the findings effectively |



The conservation plan also set out key aims based around the significant heritage themes of the parks.

| Conservation Plan aims | How the activity plan can deliver this aim |
|--|---|
| Aim D2: Develop a programme of events and activities that promotes increased use at off-peak times and encourages visits to under-used areas | Develop an annual events programme, focusing on off-peak time and using under-used areas |
| Aim D3: Review play provision across the parks and explore opportunities for expanding the play offer in a way that is sensitive to the historical landscape setting, and which builds upon the unique characteristics of each parks | Work with the Kearsney Parks Forum to seek opportunities to fundraise for play improvements |
| Aim E1: Develop proposals for interpretation and events with a view to enabling every visitor to gain some understanding of an aspect of Kearsney Parks' unique qualities and significance | Develop an interpretation plan, that includes both deliberate and incidental ways to gain an understanding of the parks' heritage |
| Aim E2: Develop a programme of events and activities that promote the unique and special character of each of the parks | Develop an annual events programme that responds to heritage and cultural aspects of each parks |
| Aim E3: Promote healthy access to the outdoor environment through a range of events and activities for visitors of all ages and abilities | Develop events and activities for all ages and abilities that will encourage healthy use of the outdoor environment e.g. self-guided walks, activities that encourage people to explore the parks on foot and discover a wider area |
| Aim F2: Ensure that the public have the opportunity to be involved in, and to learn from, archaeological investigations and explorations within the parks | Develop community and volunteer archaeological programme Develop interpretation plan to share results effectively |
| Aim L5: Develop seed banks and carry out propagation from key mature and veteran trees | Develop a Heritage Tree project, training and work with volunteers to propagate mature & veteran trees |
| Aim O1: Develop an Activities Plan identifying how local audiences will be engaged and encouraged to use the parks | Develop activities to engage a wider range of local audiences in the parks' heritage |

| Conservation Plan aims | How the activity plan can deliver this aim |
|---|--|
| Aim O2: Develop and promote a volunteer base of those willing to assist in enhancing the parks and/or in supporting activities in the parks | Develop and deliver a volunteer plan |
| Aim O3: Create a programme of events and activities that will engage audiences across local communities | Increase our understanding of local communities and existing parks users Develop events and activities that will ensure users are representative of the local community |
| Aim O4: Work with local schools and other education providers to promote links between curriculum activities and the parks | Engage local teachers and pupils in the development of the project to ensure facilities and activities meet their needs Develop formal education programme |
| Aim O5: Enable and encourage a supportive Friends Group to form | Continue to support the fledgling Kearsney Parks Events Group and Kearsney Parks Forum, helping them to develop the necessary skills and experience to become increasingly independent |
| Aim O6: Identify stakeholders and a means by which they can be informed about, and engaged in, management decisions | Develop a parks management community group that includes key stakeholders Establish ways for them to engage with decision making |
| Aim Q2: Identify the need for, and provide training in, specialist skills or knowledge, including use of the conservation plan, Heritage Impact Assessment techniques and management planning for historic landscapes | Develop Training Plan |
| Aim Q3: Explore potential for horticultural apprenticeships and skills sharing opportunities with other centres of excellence | Develop apprenticeship programme |

2.4 Our policies and operating environment

The following information provides a summary of the operating policies at Dover District Council and how they will be utilised to support the delivery of the Mills to Mawson project.

Corporate Plan (2012 – 2016)

Our corporate plan sets out four strategic priorities for the district. The components which are most relevant to this project include enabling economic growth and job creation and facilitating strong communities with a sense of place. In practice this means helping local people develop skills, undertake training and improving their access to job opportunities, while also meeting skill shortages in the local economy. We also want to encourage communities to become self-reliant and thrive, to empower communities and groups to consider how they can help themselves and their neighbours and to improve ease of travel and encourage walking, cycling and use of public transport.

Planning Policies

Our Core Strategy (2010) sets out policies to protect the character, fabric and views to and from our historic parks and gardens including Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens (Policy DM 19), as well as enhancing public access and wildlife interest on the River Dour which runs through the parks (Policy DM 18).

Our Heritage Strategy (2013), the first of its kind in the country, specifically highlights that an important element of the district's heritage is the collection of grand country houses and estates set in significant areas of parkland. As a group they are considered to be of considerable significance. The parkland setting of these houses plays a major part in the character and significance of these assets. The historic gardens at Kearsney are maintained as public gardens and provide valuable green space close to the urban center of Dover which is highly valued by the local community. The Strategy states that opportunity should be sought to continue to promote, interpret and develop the historic gardens as an important local amenity space.

Our Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011), states that Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens are among the most significant publicly accessible green infrastructure in the district. Consultation on the strategy showed that Kearsney Abbey is the most popular green infrastructure site in the district and already faces significant pressure from high visitor numbers. It also suggests that Russell Gardens is particularly sensitive to visitor numbers, given its listed status and condition.

The strategy states that the amount of residential development planned in Dover will place significant pressure on Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens, including around 14,000 new residents in 6,000 new homes just 2 miles away at Whitfield. The strategy sets out potential mitigation measures for Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens including the restoration of existing facilities and infrastructure, including historic fabric, and the creation of new and improved facilities.

Parks Policies

Our Parks & Amenity Open Space Strategy (2013) sets out our aspirations for the district's parks. It highlights our ambition to improve the quality of the strategic parks generally and at Kearsney in particular. The Strategy suggests improvements in Kearsney Parks and commits us to holding public consultation on any plans.

The strategy also identifies that raising the quality of open space provision could contribute to addressing some of the health issues identified in this district. As the Department of Health White Paper 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England' (November 2010) states 'improving the environment in which people live can make healthy lifestyles easier. When the immediate environment is unattractive, it is difficult to make physical activity and contact with nature part of everyday life'.

Our Review of Play Area Provision (2012) identified the parks as a strategic play site and designated them as a neighbourhood equipped area for play. We know that the play area in Russell Gardens is not sympathetic to its historic setting and the play area in Kearsney Abbey is often extremely busy and is reaching the end of its useful life.

Communication and Engagement

The Communication and Engagement teams service plan sets out key objectives and strategies for engaging with local people. The key objectives include engaging with communities across the Dover district to empower them in the local decision-making process and developing partnership working to promote the delivery, self-reliance and sustainability of community projects.

We are committed to ensuring that participants are clear on what they influence and how their views will be used in the overall process, appropriate mechanisms are in place to capture the views of people attending and or participating in consultations including those that do so digitally (i.e. surveys, workshops, focus groups) and that mechanisms are in place to feed back the results to the participants.

Political and Management Support

This project has both political and senior managerial support and the project steering group are committed to delivering the project aims and objectives, whilst building on existing corporate policies and creating a new standard within the organisation with regards to developing heritage assets. Together with the conservation plan and MMP, we will ensure that the work undertaken will be properly maintained and the site managed to ensure sustainability in the long term.

Project Steering Group

The group meet monthly, as well as holding ad hoc meetings when required. Throughout the development phase they have had an overview of the project and receive regular reports and feedback on project goals and stages. Any key issues or changes to the project are discussed

with the group in consultation with the Heritage Lottery Fund. Our Cabinet and Corporate Management Team also receive regular briefings and opportunities for site walkabouts.

The steering group for the project is as follows:

1. Cllr Trevor Bartlett, Cabinet Member for Property Management and Public Protection
2. Roger Walton – Director of Environment and Corporate Assets
3. Mike Ebbs – Head of Regeneration and Development
4. Martin Leggatt – Head of Assets and Building Control
5. Brinley Hill – Head of Communication and Engagement
6. Kevin Charles – Funding and Communications Manager
7. Jon Winder – Kearsney Parks Project Manager

We are also continuing to support the Kearsney Parks Forum and once they have appointed a chairperson they will be invited to sit on the steering group.



2.5 Developing our activity plan

This activity plan has been prepared in support of the second round application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Parks for People Programme. It is based on the original information that was submitted as part of our first round application but now represents significant work that has been done to understand our organisation, our audiences, our current activities and the development of an action plan for a period of four years (2016 – 2020). It has been prepared in accordance with the Activity Planning Guidance (Heritage Lottery Fund, October 2012) and in parallel with the conservation plan, landscape proposals and the ten year MMP.

Extensive consultation and research has been carried out to ensure that this activity plan meets the needs of our local communities and visitors from further afield, as well as helping existing and potential users to engage with the parks unique heritage.

Consultation and research methods have included:

- A review of existing policies, strategies, plans, relevant documents and existing provision
- A desk based market assessment of current and potential audiences
- Audience Agency profiling
- Liaising with three comparator organisations that have also delivered or are in the process of delivering Parks for People projects
- Liaising with activity plan mentor: Julia Holberry of Julia Holberry Associates
- Interviews with members of the Steering Group
- Interviews with various partners and supporters
- Interviews with local schools and learning establishments
- Interviews with community groups
- A workshop with external stakeholders
- Public Consultation sessions throughout the development phase
- Discussions with potential delivery partners
- Events in the parks
- Online survey
- Observational study
- Annual visitor surveys
- Mailing list recipients

A summary of the consultation and a full list of consultees is provided in Appendices 6 to 10 and consultation is discussed in more depth in sections 4 and 5.

2.6 Implications for the project

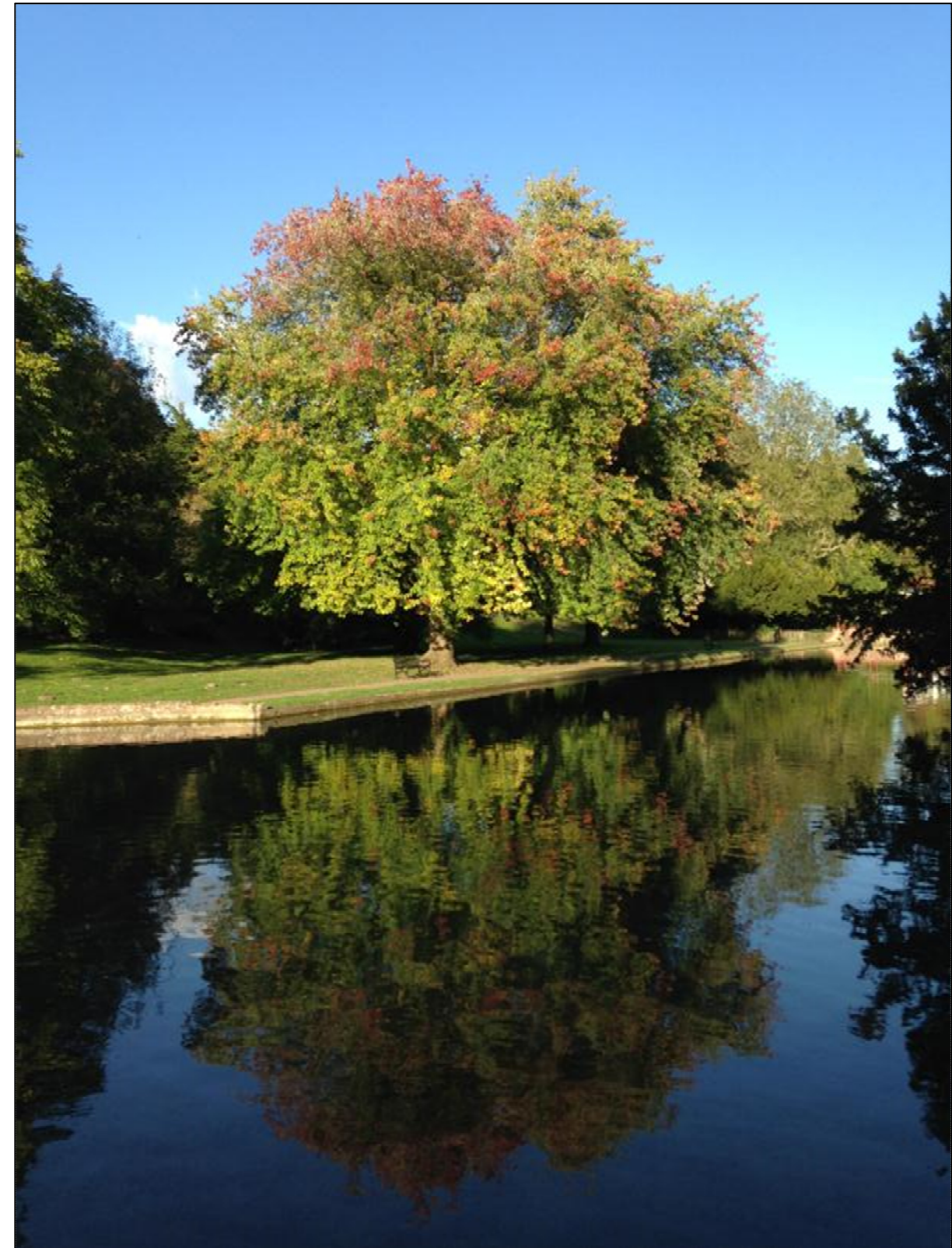
The development of our Mills to Mawson project has been shaped by our corporate objectives and key policies. In turn, the delivery of the project will help us to implement these objectives and policies, as well as making a lasting difference to the heritage, people and communities associated with Kearsney Parks.

The project will contribute to our Corporate Plan by helping local people develop skills, provide training, empower communities and encourage use of sustainable transport. It will protect the character and fabric of key historic parks and promote, interpret and develop them, helping to deliver key objectives in our Core Strategy and Heritage Strategy. Capital works will help to mitigate the impact of nearby residential development on the parks and the activity plan will help integrate new residents into the local community, addressing issues identified in our Green Infrastructure Strategy. Our renewed commitment to engaging the community in the work that we do has helped to create a sound basis for delivering the project and will help to make Kearsney Parks more sustainable for the long term.

Assessing our corporate policies, improving our understanding of the parks and their unique heritage, and engaging the local community in our project have helped us to establish an overarching vision for Kearsney Parks:

to work with the community to create high quality parks which meet the needs of existing and future park users by conserving and interpreting the significant heritage features, delivering high quality and accessible visitor facilities and activities, and managing them to high heritage, horticultural and environmental standards

In the next section we consider who our existing audiences are, reflect on existing activities, and examine what users think and feel about the parks.



3. Where we are now - audiences and activities

The following section summarises the current activities that take place in Kearsney Parks and key information that we have discovered about our existing parks users. This information will help us to make informed decisions about the shaping of the future programme of activities.

3.1 Kearsney Parks

Kearsney Parks are incredibly popular, particularly Kearsney Abbey, and are extensively used by local communities as well as visitors from all over East Kent and beyond. On busy days the car parks are at capacity and coaches are dropping off visitors at the café – but despite the influx of visitors the majority of use is still local. Whilst little of this local use is formalised at present, apart from the model boat club, the attractions of the café and water creates a sense of an inland ‘beach’ and during the summer it has a seaside atmosphere. As in many parks a major user group is dog walkers and here the south of the lake in Kearsney Abbey is particularly valued as a place where dogs can be let off the lead.

The popularity of the parks lies in the beauty and distinctiveness of their landscapes. Kearsney Abbey has its café, a remnant of the former house, from which sweeping lawns lead to a lake with potential views to the hillside beyond; Russell Gardens has its stunning canal, bridges and boathouse set amongst mature trees. Both sites are focused around the River Dour, a chalk stream that has a history of powering agricultural and industrial mills throughout the last millennium. People are drawn to these sites but many visitors are unaware of the historical importance of these landscapes, their cultural significance and of what has been lost over time through fragmentation and management of changes. These parks were originally designed as private spaces rather than as public parks.

Management and Maintenance

Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens are owned and managed by Dover District Council. The Landscape Group carries out grounds maintenance tasks on behalf of the council and they employ a site-based parks keeper. The repair and maintenance of parks infrastructure is managed by the council and carried out by contractors on an ad-hoc basis.

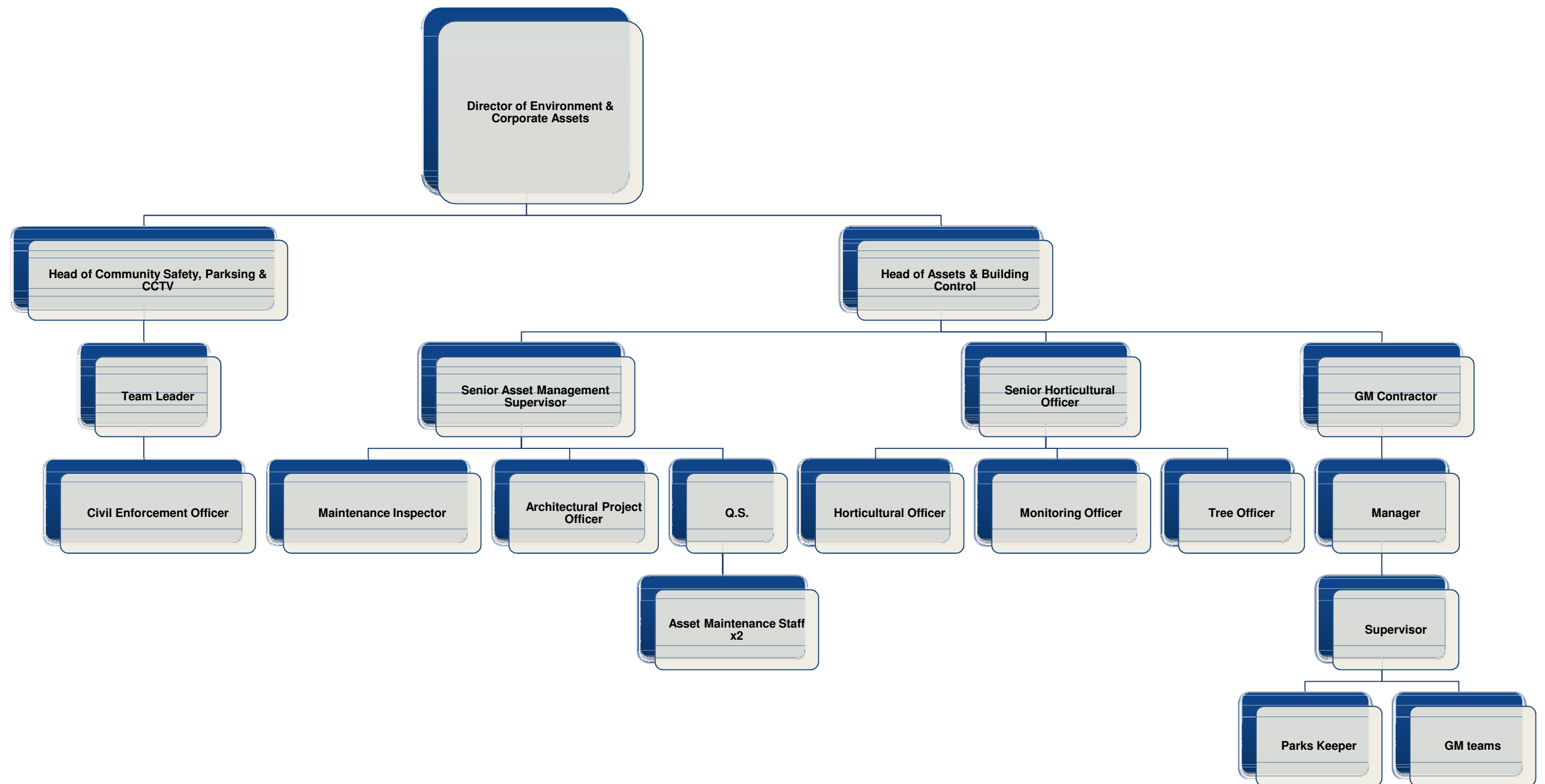
The cafe is leased to and operated by Solleys Ice Cream.

The parks are open to visitors all day, every day and all year round. The parks are not locked, nor lit at night. Visitors are not charged to use the parks.

The current management structure for Kearsney Parks is outlined on the following page.



Current Management Structure



User Activity and Informal Use

Kearsney Abbey is popular at all times of the year but especially in the summer time when the lawns become a favourite picnic site at weekends and there is a beach-like atmosphere. A play area for children is available in both parks and the lower lake in Kearsney Abbey is used for model boating. Other informal use includes walking the lawns, dog walking and participating in exercise. Russell Gardens has a much more tranquil atmosphere.

Some more formal activities have been held during the development phase of this project and these have all been well received and have helped to inform the action plan that has been produced at the end of this document. Details of these events are described further on in this section.

We estimate that the parks receive over 277,000 visitors per year despite the lack of a formal activity programme. This number of visitors places significance pressure on existing parks infrastructure and facilities. Given the parks current popularity, we are not aiming to significantly increase visitor numbers, but rather attract a broader range of people who travel to the parks more sustainably as well as help to deepen existing and potential visitors' engagement with the heritage of the parks. However, one specific aim of the activity plan is to encourage our visitors to explore more of the parks when they visit, as people predominantly cluster around the facilities (car parks, toilets and café). We intend to do this with the varied programme of activities and events that are on offer over the course of the project (see section 6).



3.2 Current activities

The following section details the activities that currently take place in Kearsney Parks. As previously mentioned there is no formal community engagement programme for Kearsney Parks. No national events are currently celebrated in the parks, event organisers generally do not hire the parks to hold their own events, schools are not engaged or supported and there are no specific events put on for the public or communities in the catchment area. Equally, there is no community group in place to promote access and enjoyment of the parks. Through consultation with site staff, community groups and parks users, we have been able to develop our understanding of the activities that currently take place.

Organised Activities

The Model Boat Association Dover (MBAD) holds approximately 30 sessions at the boating lake in Kearsney Abbey each year. These are events that are organised and managed by the club for the club members. Parks visitors can view their activities but the sessions are not open to the public. All events are currently held in Kearsney Abbey, but MBAD have expressed an interest in using Russell Gardens as well. The consistent and regular presence of MBAD members and their activity is an essential part of the parks appeal and helps to provide informal surveillance and contributes to users' sense of safety.

Other organised activities include occasional small scale family events organised by the café like Easter egg hunts and two of the annual White Cliff Walking Festival walks start in Kearsney Abbey.

As part of wider programmes, the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP) delivers occasional pond dipping activities and seasonal walks. Once a year WCCP volunteers are involved with the River Dour clean up. This activity starts in Kearsney Abbey and moves to sites that need clearing; it is run, managed and promoted by WCCP.

In the past the council has not organised activities or events because there is no budget allocated and significant other pressures on staff time. The only exceptions are the consultation events that have taken place to inform this project and an event to celebrate the achievement of a family and schools programme in 2014. Having said that, we do have an events process in place which helps event organisers deliver safe events on council owned land and ensure health, safety and public welfare are considered. Our Safety Advisory Group, comprising members of the local authority, emergency services and highways, oversee this.

Whilst there are no structured sporting activities that take place in the parks, the council do support use of Kearsney Parks for sport related activities. Occasionally there are requests for outdoor exercise classes to be held in the parks; however exercise is mainly conducted on an individual basis in the form of walking and running.

Schools

Through consultation with local pre-schools, primary schools and a secondary school, we now know that the parks is occasionally used by schools, mainly for fun, play and as a reward for good behaviour. These activities are organised by the schools themselves, self-managed and rarely engage with the heritage or ecology of the parks. There is an appetite from the schools for an educational activity and events programme to be developed and delivered in the parks.

Volunteering & Training

There are currently no opportunities to get involved with work placements, apprenticeships or training. Volunteering in the parks is limited to the River Dour clean-up day organised by WCCP, mainly using people from their volunteer database, rather than local people or parks users.

Interpretation

Interpretation in the parks is currently extremely limited. There is one information board in Kearsney Abbey, near the café. This board is not particularly attractive, uses small print and the information it contains is limited. There are no leaflets or literature that detail any information about the parks, key heritage assets or accessibility information.

This information demonstrates the severe lack of activities that take place in the parks currently and the potential for Kearsney Parks to become a hub of activity in the future as an outcome of the Mills to Mawson project.



3.3 Current audiences

Visitor numbers

In our round one bid we estimated visitor numbers as 30,000 each year. However, following more robust data collection during our development phase and more detailed analysis and extrapolation, we now estimate that the parks receive approximately 270,000 visitors per year.

We used observational surveys to gather data on the number of visitors to the parks and to help develop a better understanding of our visitor profile. A full explanation of this approach can be found in section 5.7 and appendix 2.

Experience during our development phase has demonstrated that events are also likely to increase visitor numbers to the parks, with around 300 people attending the Chairman's Garden Party in September 2014, 3,000 attending an activity day in April 2015 (Easter holidays), 3,000 attending a farm and forest day in August 2015 (summer holidays) and around 400 people attending public consultation events held in the parks in July and October 2015.

Where our visitors are from

A visitor survey of the parks conducted in 2013, where a total of 691 surveys were completed, told us that:

- 57% of parks users were from the Dover Town and surrounding rural area
- 37% (excluding Dover) were from East Kent
- 6% were from elsewhere

Frequency of use

Our 2013 survey also showed that:

- 11% visited on a daily basis
- 29% visited weekly
- 32% visited monthly
- 19% visited quarterly
- 7% annually

Visitor Profile

Our 2015 observational studies not only counted the number of people around the parks on any given day but they also recorded gender, age, ethnicity, visible disability, who visitors visited with and their primary activity. Surveys were conducted in May, August and November 2015 and a summary of the results can be found below.

On average we found that 48% of our visitors are male and 52% are female. With the local population being 50% male and 50% female, this indicates that males are slightly under-represented amongst users of the parks but not significantly so.

In terms of age, approximately 30 % of visitors are under the age of 11 years, 11 % are aged between 11 -20 years and 59 % were adults (over the age of 20 years). The proportion of visitors aged 0 to 11 years are hugely over-represented when compared to the population data

for the catchment area (19%), however the number of parks visitors aged 11 – 20 years old is fairly reflective (7%). Parks users aged 20 years and over are significantly under represented when compared to the population data for catchment area (74%).

On average, 97 % of parks users are white with only 3 % from BME communities, which is broadly representative of the parks catchment area, where 5% are from BME communities and 95% of people are white in both the 3 mile and East Kent catchment.

In terms of disability, just 1% of visitors were identified as being visibly disabled. However, limitations of the observational method need to be taken into consideration when interpreting this data. Population data for the catchment area states that 10% of a person's day to day activities are limited a lot by a long-term health problem or disability, 11% are limited a little and 79% are not limited at all. This demonstrates that the number of parks visitors with disabilities and therefore the likelihood of day to day activities being limited a little or a lot are not reflective of the number of people in the catchment area affected by a long-term health problem or disability.

The following table summarises the data collected in observational surveys:

| | Percentage | | | | | | | |
|----------|------------|----|------|-------|-----|-----------|-----|-----------------|
| | Gender | | Age | | | Ethnicity | | Disabled people |
| | M | F | 0-11 | 12-20 | 20+ | White | BME | |
| May 2015 | 46 | 54 | 37 | 17 | 46 | 98 | 2 | 0.28 |
| Aug 2015 | 46 | 54 | 38 | 8 | 54 | 96 | 4 | 1 |
| Nov 2015 | 52 | 48 | 14 | 7 | 78 | 97 | 3 | 2 |
| Average | 48 | 52 | 30 | 11 | 59 | 97 | 3 | 1 |

Historical knowledge

The 2013 survey showed that 64% of visitors had no knowledge of the parks' history, 22% had some knowledge of the parks' history and 10% had inaccurate historical knowledge.

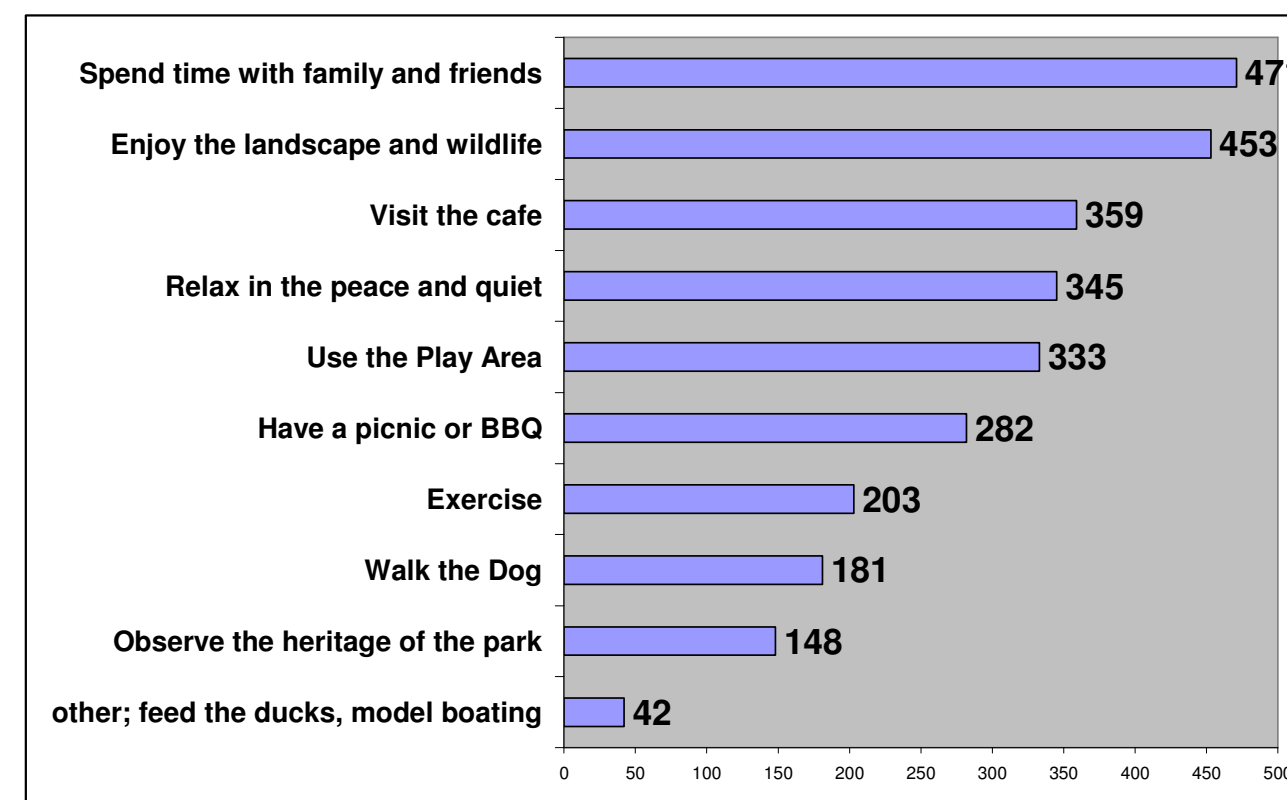
Travel

Our 2013 and 2015 visitor surveys asked respondents how they normally travel to the parks. The results are below:

| Mode of transport | |
|-------------------|-------|
| On foot | 41% |
| Bike | 2% |
| Bus | 5.5% |
| Train | 3% |
| Car | 48.5% |

Reasons for visiting

The 2013 visitor survey asked visitors to indicate which activities they would 'normally' participate in when visiting the parks, and they were given the opportunity to select as many responses as were relevant. Of the 691 respondents, the two activities that came top were spending time with family and friends (68%) and enjoying the landscape and wildlife (65%). Only a fifth of people visit to observe the heritage of the parks.



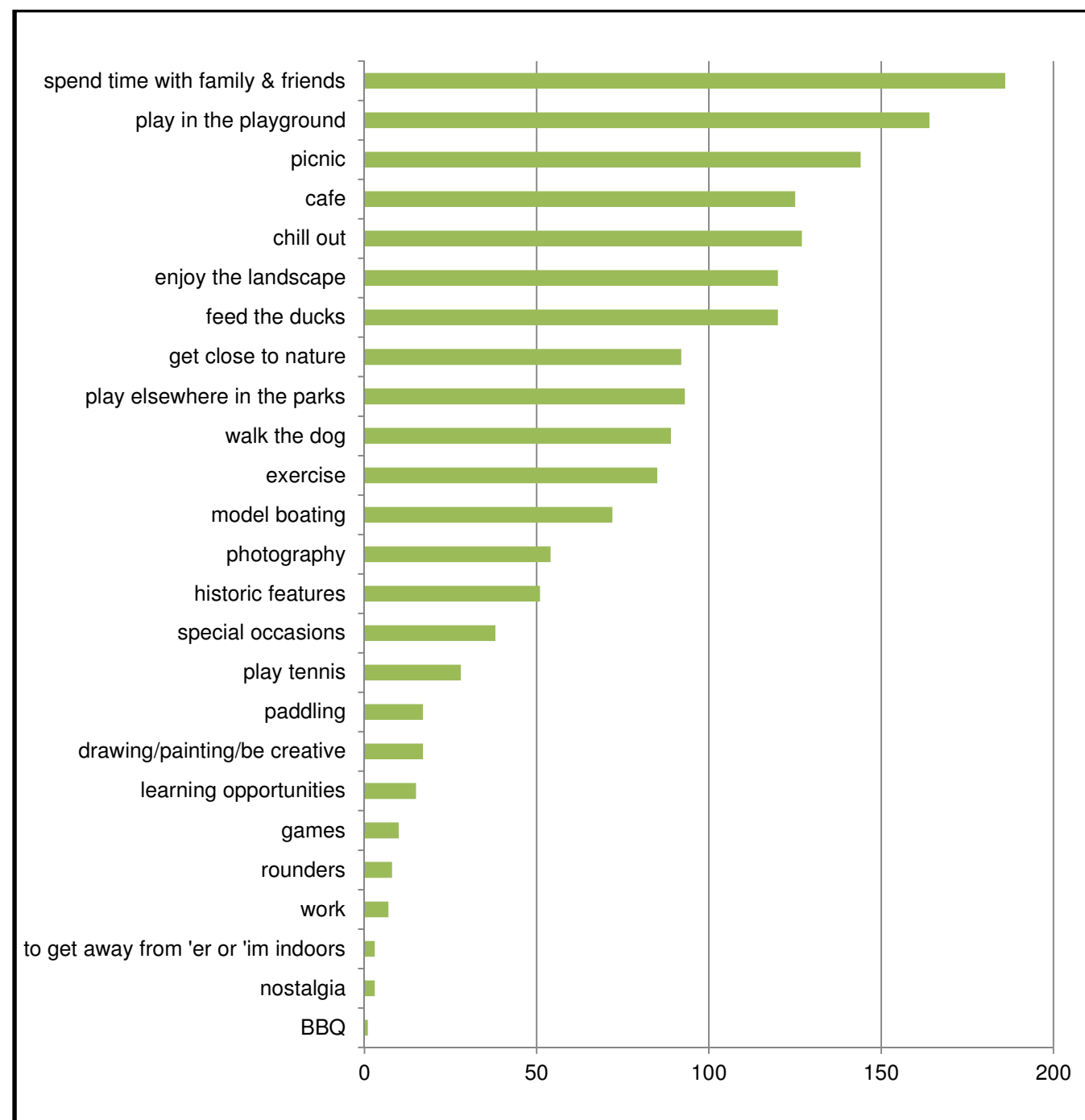
A number of survey respondents also made reference to the following in their comments:

- Dover Model Boat Club
- Feeding the ducks and swans
- Visiting with clients with learning disabilities
- Pre-School/child minding
- Lunch with work colleagues
- Ramblers/NHS walking groups
- School groups

Our 2015 activity day help use to find out what people love about the parks, why they use them and what activities they would like to see in the future.

The results have helped to shape the development of our activity programme and informed our conservation plan. We held the Kearsney Parks Activity day on 16 April 2015 from 10am until 4pm and asked attendees to use stickers and post it notes to record their views on large posters. An online survey which asked the same questions was open from 16 April until 4 May.

The following table shows how people responded to the question ‘Why do you come to the parks?’



During the activity day people were also asked what they loved about Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens. The responses demonstrate how important and popular the parks are both locally and regionally. Some of the responses are shown below:



Other comments on the day included:

- Love the scenery, the river and all the other features
- Love the open space, feels clean and safe
- A place you can come with your family, there's something for everyone to enjoy
- It's a very picturesque, pretty open space. The best in the area for people of all ages.
- We are so lucky to have such a lovely area where we live
- Lovely to grow up in beautiful surroundings
- Lots of memories here

Our 2013 survey showed that 92% of respondents usually visit Kearsney Abbey, making it by far the more popular of the two parks; however it is worth noting that Kearsney Abbey has the majority of parking facilities, the only café and toilets. One third of people normally visit Russell Gardens.

The survey also revealed that 83% of visitors believed that the parks enhanced their quality of life and 71% felt that the parks provided a place where there is a sense of community.

Visitor concerns

Users' concerns about the parks relate to parking facilities with 36% of respondents stating that car parking was average when rated in terms of quality. Likewise, toilets facilities (35%), information about the parks (37%) and directional signage (33%), bins (including dog bins) (37%) and seating (36%) were all rated as average in terms of quality.

Comments about the general infrastructure of the parks, with particular emphasis on toilets, car parking and general maintenance were as follows:

- Bigger and better car parks
- Improved road crossing on the Alkham Road
- Would like better/improved toilet facilities
- Better maintenance throughout, particularly footpaths and lighting
- More seating and picnic tables all over the parks
- Bigger/better play area and more equipment for toddlers and older children
- More bins around the parks to keep it clean and convenient for parks users

Several respondents also made comments about the café within Kearsney Abbey:

- Would like a visitor centre / Educational Centre
- Much needed improvements and restoration to the café
- Café needs a wider choice on the menu and an ice-cream van in the summer
- Longer opening hours for the café
- More outdoor seating near the café with a section undercover for rainy days



3.4 Implications for the project

Developing our activity plan has helped us to increase our understanding of our current activities and audiences.

Our existing activities are largely limited to grounds maintenance and unplanned repairs. The quality of our grounds maintenance is reasonable but we could improve the quality of our ad-hoc repairs, particularly those made to heritage structures. The delivery of additional activities relies on other organisations and, while they are much valued, their audiences are relatively limited.

We now better understand who else uses the parks, what they use it for and the importance it plays in their quality of life. We better understand visitors' motivation for coming to the parks, which parts of the parks they use and what they know about the parks' heritage. Anecdotally we knew the parks were busy at peak times but our observational surveys have helped us to properly understand the number of visits, how people get there, which parts of the parks they use and where they travel from.

This information has major implications for our project – perhaps most importantly it highlights the parks' huge potential. There is scope for our project to:

- Significantly increase visitors' understanding and engagement with the parks' history and heritage
- Vastly improve interpretation and develop a more extensive activities programme
- Promote sustainable transport and reduce the environmental impact on the parks
- Build on the parks contribution to quality of life and sense of community
- Address existing users' concerns
- Help schools maximise the parks' educational potential
- Build on the limited volunteering that takes place
- Help staff and volunteers develop skills to ensure the long term conservation of the parks' heritage